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**The Russo-Japanese War and the Perception of the Japanese Army in
Imperial Germany**
Frank Jacob

The Russo-Japanese War (1904/5) between Czarist Russia and Imperial Japan was an expansionist war for influence in Korea. It was also the first war between industrialized powers in the 20th century and should, with all its new technologies and the increased level of destruction, have pointed towards the First World War a decade later. Contemporaries like Rosa Luxemburg (1871-1919) realized that the Russo-Japanese War highlighted the interrelations between events far away from Europe and the great power politics in the capitals of the latter continent.¹ The war was, after all, a historical watershed of global importance.² In Japan, this war was even more important than the Great War, as it marked the end of Japan's successful modernization process and international acceptance of a great power of equal rank to the Western ones.³ The role of the Japanese Empire during the war was also often perceived as that of a defender of democratic ideas against an autocratic and backward Czarist Empire, an image as depicted, for example, in the writings of famous US travel writer and "Russia expert" George Kennan the Elder (1845-1924).⁴ This image was also shared by British news reports, and the military correspondent of *The Times* highlights the importance of the Japanese victories over the Russian armies in Manchuria for international observers:

No great campaign fought out within the memory of this generation offers such a vast and fruitful field for study by men of the British race as the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-5. For the first time for nearly a hundred years we have seen an island Empire at grips with a first-rate continental Power. For the

¹ Rosa Luxemburg, "In the Storm," (1904). Accessed June 27, 2015. <http://www.marxists.org/archive/luxemburg/1904/05/01.htm>.

² For a detailed analysis of this global impact see: Frank Jacob, *The Russo-Japanese War and Its Shaping of the Twentieth Century* (London: Routledge, 2018).

³ The importance of the war in Japan is also resembled in many publications related to its centennial in 2004/5. Some of them are *Nichi-Ro Sensō to Higashi Ajia sekai* (The Russo-Japanese War and the East Asian World), ed. Higashi Ajia Kindaishi Gakkai (The Academic Society for the Modern History of East Asia) (Tokyo: Yumani Shobō, 2008); Numata Takazō, *Nichi-Ro rikusen shinshi* (A New History of the Land Battles of the Russo-Japanese War) (Tokyo: Fuyō Shobō, 2004); Tsuchiya Yoshifuru, *Teikoku no tasogare, mikan no kokumin: Nichi-Ro Sensō, Daiichiji kakumei to roshia no shakai* (The Twilight of the Empire, the Unfinished Nation: The Russo-Japanese War, the First Revolution and Russian Society) (Tokyo: Seibunsha, 2012); Yomiura Shinbun Shuzaihan, *Kenshō Nichi-Ro Sensō* (Analysis of the Russo-Japanese War) (Tokyo: Chūō Kōron Shinsha, 2005). Despite these rather recent publications, which are just a few examples, there are also very good earlier studies, like Shimomura Fujio, *Nichi-Ro Sensō* (The Russo-Japanese War) (Tokyo: Jinbutsu Ōraisha, 1966), to name just one example.

⁴ Kennan published more than 20 articles on the war, e.g. George Kennan, "War by Prearrangement," *Outlook* 77 (August 13, 1904), 977-983 and George Kennan, "A Japanese Naval School," *Outlook* 77 (August 27, 1904), 890-896.

first time the new machinery with which science and modern invention have endowed the navies of the world has been put to the practical test of serious war. For the first time, almost in the history of the world, we have seen naval and military forces, directed by master hands, co-operating in close and cordial fashion to impose, by their united efforts, the national will upon the enemy.⁵

The present chapter, however, will focus on the perception of the war and the Japanese soldiers by the German military, whose representatives were quite interested in the events of the Far East. The government in Berlin and Kaiser Wilhelm II (1859-1941) had hoped to bind Russia closer to Germany during the conflict, but failed to gain a full reciprocal alliance with the Czarist Empire, although the Emperor and the Czar had drafted such an agreement during the war.⁶ More important, however, was the impact of the war, when it came to German military planning in the aftermath. It was the perception of Japanese strength and Russian weakness that would define Germany's future military goals and chances alike, which will be discussed in more detail in the second part of the present chapter.

The German Observation of the War

In the beginning, German military and naval officers were sceptics when the chance of a Japanese victory in a war against Russia was considered. Like many others, the German military observers did not believe that the tiny island nation would stand a chance against the Russian "steam roller" everyone had been fearing in a war scenario on the European continent.⁷ Naval officers, however, were keen to know more about the actual performance of modern ships and especially naval artillery, which is why the observation of the events by German officers was specifically requested.⁸ Wilhelm II, i.e. "Admiral Berlin", consequently sent naval officers to the Far East to observe the war and ordered them

- a) To gather experience of the impact of modern armory against modern targets.
- b) To form an opinion about the tactics and use of modern squadrons, ships and torpedo boats at day and night.

⁵ Military Correspondent of *The Times*, *The War in the Far East 1904-1905* (New York: E. P. Dutton and Company, 1905), 1.

⁶ Nicholas II to Wilhelm II, Peterhof, October, 7, 1905 in *Die Große Politik der europäischen Kabinette, 1871-1914: Sammlung der diplomatischen Akten des Auswärtigen Amtes*, eds. Johannes Lepsius et al., 40 vols. (Berlin: Deutsche Verlagsgesellschaft für Politik und Geschichte, 1922-1927) (henceforth GP), No. 6247. I will identify the specific documents by their No. All the relevant documents can be found in vol. 19.1 and 19.2.

⁷ Philip Towle, "The Russo-Japanese War and the Defence of India," *Military Affairs* 44:3 (1980), 113.

⁸ Commander of the Naval Station of the North Sea to the Chief of the Admiral Staff of the Navy, Wilhelmshaven, February 28, 1904, Federal Archives, Military Archive Freiburg i. Brsg., Germany (henceforth BArch MArch), RM 5/5777.

- c) To gather experience of the execution of larger troop transports and landing operations, on the necessary and suitable food supplies and facilities, and on the method of joint ventures between army and naval administration.
- d) To closely study the material and personnel capabilities of the participating naval force.⁹

In contrast to other observing nations, Germany had access to the Russian perspective of the war and Wilhelm could send his officers to Port Arthur, from where they would send their reports about the war effort of the Czarist Empire. The reports highlighted the bad situation of the Russian fleet, especially considering the low morale of its sailors. The German military experts had clearly overrated the potential of the Czarist Navy.¹⁰ The victories of the Japanese Navy, commanded by Admiral Tōgō Heihachirō (1848-1934), highlighted that better ships – in this case built in Britain – as well as better training and morale were important for Japan's success. One of the reports from August 1904 emphasizes the results of accurate Japanese artillery bombardments for the Russian cruiser *Gromoboi* at Ulsan and draws the following conclusion from the first naval battles of the war: "Now, armored protection, protection and again protection is necessary. This battle answered many questions."¹¹

These early observations were further proved by the Battle of Tsushima in May 1905, in which the Japanese fleet was eventually able to destroy the menace of Russian ships in the region and force the Czar and his government in St. Petersburg to accept the necessity for peace talks.¹² While submarines had also been active during the war, they had not yet played an important role.¹³ More effective were torpedo boats, which would launch torpedoes against the Russian fleet during the surprise attack on the Russian fleet at Port Arthur in early February 1904, especially since the torpedo nets that were supposed to protect the ships were practically useless.¹⁴

However, the Japanese soldiers were not only successful on sea, but also on land – the Russian troops stood no chance against the Asian enemy. The so-called "Prussians of

⁹ Wilhelm II, Order for the Naval Officers Sent to the Russian or Japanese Forces, Berlin, February 13, 1904, BACh MArch, RM 5/5772.

¹⁰ Report of Bonsart von Schellendorf, Major in the General Staff, Schettningen, July 14, 1905, BACh MArch, RM 5/5773.

¹¹ Battle Report of Captain Finograzky, Commander of the Cruiser *Gromoboi*, Wladivostok, August 14, 1904, BACh MArch RM 5/5773. On the battle of the *Gromoboi* at Ulsan on 14 August 1904, see Peter Brook, *Armoured Cruiser vs. Armoured Cruiser: Ulsan 14 August 1904* (London: Conway Maritime Press, 2000).

¹² On the Battle of Tsushima see: Frank Jacob, *Tsushima 1905: Ostasiens Trafalgar* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2017).

¹³ Naval Attaché for the Nordic Empires, Paul von Hintze, to the State Secretary of the German Imperial Naval Office, Berlin, St. Petersburg, November 17, 1904, BACh MArch, RM 5/5769.

¹⁴ Secret Report of the Imperial Dockyard Kiel, Scheibe, to the State Secretary of the German Imperial Naval Office in Berlin, Kiel, June 28, 1906, BACh MArch RM 5/5771, 4-5.

Asia” – as they were called due to the initial training of the Japanese General Staff by Prussian officers, like Jacob Meckel (1842-1905), who had served as a military advisor to the Japanese Army in the years after the Meiji Restoration of 1868, namely in the early to mid-1880s – gained battle after battle and the German newspapers joined the international laudation of Japan’s military apparatus.¹⁵ The first land battle at the Yalu River, which marked the border between Korea and Manchuria, was the first Japanese victory against a Western nation, and was a real surprise.

General Kuroki Tamemoto (1844-1923) had to cross the river with his 42,000 men, while 19,000 Russians defended the positions on the antagonists’ side.¹⁶ The Japanese were able to cross the river very quickly and defeated the Czarist army without much resistance. This was a pattern that would characterize the initial period of the war, when General Alexei Kuropatkin (1848-1925), the supreme commander of the Russian Army during the Russo-Japanese War and War Minister, was eager to avoid a direct confrontation and the possible annihilation of his troops in the region until the Trans-Siberian Railway had transported sufficient additional troops to the war zone from European Russia. For him, like for most observers after the Japanese success at the Yalu, it was obvious that the present war was everything but a little colonial war, as the Western powers had known from the previous centuries.¹⁷ The Japanese crossed the river in only one night, before launching a large scale attack on the positions of Russian commander Mikhail Zasulich (1843-1910) on 1 May 1904, who could only eventually withdraw his troops to Liaoyang.

Eberhard von Tettau (1857-1922), who accompanied the Russian army as a military observer for the German Empire, later highlighted the importance of heavy guns: “120 Japanese guns fired at the same time ... The few Russian guns tried to return fire, but were immediately silenced.”¹⁸ The Czarist Army also had problems with coordination during the battle, and friendly fire caused quite a lot of casualties. The better training of the Japanese soldiers was obvious and the amount of munitions and shells used that day

¹⁵ “Der Japanismus im Schwinden,” *Hamburger Nachrichten* 710 (October 8, 1904), Federal Archives Berlin (henceforth BArch), R 8034-II/8170.

¹⁶ John W. Steinberg, “The Operational Overview,” in *The Russo-Japanese War in Global Perspective: World War Zero*, vol.1, eds. John W. Steinberg et al. (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2005), 111. Freiherr Eberhard von Tettau, *Achtzehn Monate beim Heere Russlands* (Berlin: Mittler und Sohn, 1907), vol. 1, 89, however, speaks of 5,600 Russians and 36,000 Japanese. For a detailed account of the battle, see: *Ibid.*, 85-106.

¹⁷ See, for example, the comparative evaluation in: “Buren- und japanische Taktik,” *Der Tag* 445, September 22, 1904, BArch R 8034-II/8170.

¹⁸ Tettau, *Achtzehn Monate*, 90.

already highlighted the fact that a new age of warfare had begun.¹⁹ This was also visible with regard to the high number of casualties, counting 2,000 men on the Russian side and 900 on the Japanese side.²⁰ While many international observers realized the Japanese superiority on the battlefield and argued it to be related to better planning and preparation, as well as better equipment and the higher morale of the troops from the island nation, Tettau instead highlighted the Russian incompetence, especially when describing the role of the Czarist officers in the defeats and steady retreats that followed the Battle of the Yalu. According to him, it was not the Russian soldiers that had failed, as the typical man in the Czar's troops was "[l]oyal, self-denying, totally trusting his officer, the Russian soldier provides solid material in the hand of good capable leaders, which is almost incomparable among other armies of the world. ... The fact that this excellent material failed anyway had multiple reasons; they were due to the way of preparation and the use of the material."²¹ It is clear that the German observer pointed the finger towards his officer colleagues in the Russian Army, while at the same time arguing that, with better leadership, the Czarist soldiers could easily be superior. In some way, it was obvious what impact education, in the case of the Japanese Army a Prussian military education, could have. The war consequently did not only prove Japan's capability to hold its own in a military contest with Russia, it indirectly also proved the superiority of the German military education over the one that had produced the weak military leadership within the Czarist forces.

The German press, however, also emphasized racist arguments for Russia's defeat, as the Eastern European empire could not be considered truly Western, but rather had to be seen as a "half-Asia[n]"²² power. In military circles, however, there was also an expression of understanding for Kuropatkin's tactics, who did not want to lose his army in the region, leaving it totally undefended against the Japanese, while he was waiting for reinforcements from Europe.²³ Yet the worth of such a long period of inactivity that caused countless casualties and gave the Japanese all the time necessary to take over important

¹⁹ A. L. Haldane, "Fourth Japanese Army: Operations from the Date of its Disembarkation in Manchuria to the 31st July 1904," in *The Russo-Japanese War. Reports from British Officers Attached to the Japanese and Russian Forces in the Field*, vol. 1 (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1908), 129; C. V. Hume, "First Japanese Army: The Battle of the Ya-Lu; lecture given by a Japanese General Staff Officer, with remarks by Lieut.-General Sir Ian Hamilton," in *The Russo-Japanese War. Reports from British Officers Attached to the Japanese and Russian Forces in the Field*, vol. 1 (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1908), 15-18.

²⁰ *Der Russisch-Japanische Krieg*, Beihefte zur *Marine-Rundschau* (Berlin: Mittler und Sohn, 1904), 100.

²¹ Tettau, *Achtzehn Monate*, IV.

²² "Die gelbe Gefahr," *Deutsche Tageszeitung* 115, May 28, 1904, BAArch R 8034-II/8169.

²³ *Der Russisch-Japanische Krieg*, Beihefte zur *Marine-Rundschau*, 94.

strategic positions was also discussed.²⁴ One important aspect that probably clouded the German view of Russia's military potential in the following years was the problems the Czarist Empire faced with regard to the mobilization and transport of troops to East Asia.²⁵ At the same time, the Russian soldier was neither well trained, nor well treated, sometimes even provided with food that could no longer be eaten.²⁶ The bad morale of Russian officers in Manchuria was probably also related to the region, where there was a "poor rations and munitions supply and a command expectation of reinforcements, which explained the inactivity that had such a debilitating effect on morale."²⁷ All in all, the loyalty of the Russian soldiers and officers was not very strong, and military order could collapse in the first moment of pressure. A report by the German General Consulate in China also reported that the Russian sailors whose ship was interned in Shanghai in December 1904 seemed to be only interested in amusement, instead of getting back to Russia to fight the enemy again.²⁸

All in all, the war evoked a rather negative image of the Russian Army in Germany.²⁹ This, at the same time, stimulated a positive perception of the performance of the Japanese soldiers, but also provoked, and not only in Germany, an increase of fears of a "yellow peril." It was nevertheless obvious for any military observer that the two armies technically had nothing in common: "The Russian soldiers are masterly in retreat, whilst the Japanese are very unskilled in it."³⁰ Kuropatkin, who after the war was personally blamed for the Russian defeats, also emphasized the inequality of his troops and the Japanese soldiers when it came to capability, due to training and equipment.³¹ The Russian war plan,

²⁴ Ibid., 95.

²⁵ *Berliner Lokal Anzeiger* 400, August 26, 1904, BArch R 8034-II/8170.

²⁶ "Das Aussehen des russischen Soldaten," *Hamburger Courier* 500, November 4, 1904, BArch R 8034-II/8170.; "Russische Konserven," *Schlesische Zeitung* 813, November 18, 1904, BArch R 8034-II/8170.

²⁷ Oleg R. Airapetov, "The Russian Army's Fatal Flaws," in *The Russo-Japanese War in Global Perspective: World War Zero* vol.1, eds. John W. Steinberg et al. (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2005), 163.

²⁸ Imperial German General Consulate in China, Dr. Knappe, to Chancellor Count von Bülow, Shanghai, December 17, 1904, BArch MArch, RM 5/5775.

²⁹ "Die Zustände in der russischen Armee," *Vossische Zeitung* 248, 27 May 1905, BArch R 8034-II/8170.

³⁰ Sakurai Tadayoshi, *Human Bullets: A Soldier's Story of Port Arthur* (Boston/New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1907), 48.

³¹ Alexei Kuropatkin, *The Russian Army and the Japanese War* (New York: Dutton, 1909), vol.1, 241. For a detailed analysis of Kuropatkin's war diary, see: Hirono Yoshihiko "Kuropatkin Nihon Nikki ni tsuite (Thoughts on Kuropatkin's Japan Diary)," in *Nichiro Sensō Kenkyū no shin-shiten* (New Research Perspectives on the Russo-Japanese War), ed. Nichiro Sensō Kenkyūkai (Yokohama: Seibunsha, 2005), 31-45.

however, was not an offensive one and the first defeats rather seemed to be a calculation, as the Naval Attaché for the Nordic Empires, Paul von Hintze (1864-1941), had reported from Russia in April 1904: “The Russians, with regard to their own announcements, were totally bargained for their check back after 9 February and for being driven back beyond Manchuria and losing control of the sea.”³² One has to highlight here as well that although the Russian Army never won a battle during the Russo-Japanese War, it remained a dangerous factor for Japan, whose military leaders realized the threat of the existence of an enemy force which could still be strengthened by further troop transports, while their own manpower seemed to be almost overstretched after extremely high casualties, as caused, for example, by the siege of Port Arthur during the previous months.

Regardless of their heavy losses, the Japanese never stopped the attacks, something that caused a lot of admiration,³³ but also misconceptions about the role of spirit for the success of an assault attack that would mislead so many military decision makers during the First World War – that they could overcome well defended positions just by better mental conditions. While piles of corpses and rivers of blood could be seen on the battlefield during the siege of Port Arthur and beyond, the German observers were cheering about the indestructible Japanese spirit: “Both officer and ordinary man knew what he was fighting for and invested his highest ambition to lose his life for his godlike ruler and ‘Dai Nippon’ on the battlefield.”³⁴ The military lessons were obviously poisoned by a wish to believe that a frontal assault could still decide the war.

In his article “Attack and Defense,” published in the *Vierteljahrshefte für Truppenführung und Heereskunde* (Quarterly Journal of Troop Leadership and Military Art), General Ludwig Freiherr von Falkenhausen (1844-1936) was convinced that the Japanese success had proved, according to the German interpretation of the war, that military commanders should rather take the initiative and seek to decide a battle by attacking the enemy with full forces.³⁵ It was obvious that the infantry and artillery needed to cooperate better, while the role of the cavalry was reduced to an observing or pursuing force.³⁶ The Russians, argued

³² Naval Attaché for the Nordic Empires, Paul von Hintze, to the State Secretary of the German Imperial Naval Office, Berlin, St. Petersburg, April 1, 1904, BArch MArch, RM 5/5766, 4.

³³ Naval Attaché at the Japanese Embassy, Trummler, to His Majesty Emperor and King Wilhelm II, Tokyo, December 29, 1904, BArch MArch RM 5/5769.

³⁴ Military Report No. 18/06 of the Military Attaché in Tokyo, Major v. Etzel, to the Royal Prussian Ministry of War, Berlin, Tokyo, February 25, 1906, BArch MArch, RM 5/5771.

³⁵ General der Infanterie z.D. Frhr. v. Falkenhausen, “Angriff und Verteidigung,” *Vierteljahrshefte für Truppenführung und Heereskunde* 3, no. 2 (1906): 390.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 398 and 403.

Falkenhausen, only lost due to a failure in strategy, i.e. Kuropatkin's decisions to retreat instead of a more aggressive attack being undertaken by the Czarist Army against the Japanese positions. The overall lesson seemed simple: "In my opinion the Russo-Japanese War provides us after a longer break with another example to conclude that attack is the stronger form - or better expressed - the more effective means of warfare, something one however must well know and be capable of."³⁷ But it was false lessons that had been learned from the Russo-Japanese War, and when the soldiers of the First World War were sent into no man's land, wave after wave, it was to die while being shot multiple times by machine guns, bleeding out in barbed wire or being physically destroyed while their bodies were torn apart by artillery shells.³⁸ The "Japanese spirit" (*Yamato-damashii*) was deemed superior than the morale of the Russian soldier and the question of success was no longer solely related to leadership and equipment, to strategy and tactics, it was a question related to the mind. It was a doctrine that many military leaders would refer to when looking for answers to the stalemate of the trench war of the Western front of the Great War.³⁹

At the same time, the official German history of the Russo-Japanese War is steadily repeating the argument that a lack of professional military leadership, i.e. Prusso-German military leadership, was responsible for Russia's defeat and therefore for the success of the Japanese soldiers. It was Russian indecisiveness that determined the outcome of the war.⁴⁰ The aggressive war plans in the years leading from the Russo-Japanese War to the First World War⁴¹ must consequently be considered a response to Japan's victory, which was considered more of a Russian failure than a Japanese success in the end.

³⁷ Ibid., 411-413, quote from 413.

³⁸ Gary P. Cox, "Of Aphorisms, Lessons, and Paradigms: Comparing the British and German Official Histories of the Russo-Japanese War," *The Journal of Military History* 56:3 (1992), 392.

³⁹ On the cultural history of this Japanese concept see: Saitō Shōji, "*Yamatodamashii*" *no bunkashi* (A Cultural History of the "Japanese Spirit") (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1973). For a detailed study on offensive military doctrines before the First World War see: Jack K. Snyder, *The Ideology of the Offensive: Military Decision Making and the Disasters of 1914* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1984).

⁴⁰ Cox, "Aphorisms," 396-397.

⁴¹ M. Christian Ortner, "Die Kriegs- und Aufmarschpläne Österreich-Ungarns, Deutschlands, Frankreichs und Russlands im Juli 1914," in *Erster Weltkrieg: Globaler Konflikt – Lokale Folgen – Neue Perspektiven*, ed. Stefan Karner and Philipp Lesiak (Innsbruck/Wien/Bozen: StudienVerlag, 2014), 45-61.

The Military Impact of the War in Germany

The interest in the Russo-Japanese War in Germany was definitely existent, considering that there were quite a few publications dealing with the events in the Far East.⁴² Especially after the Battle of Tsushima, the naval performance of the Russian sailors, who were said, in strong contrast to the sailors of the Japanese navy, to be incapable of maneuvering a ship and accurately firing its guns, was harshly criticized in German navy circles.⁴³ Some German observers went so far as to claim that “Russia ... would never be a great seapower.”⁴⁴ Russian Admiral Fyodor Avelan (1839-1916), in a private talk with Paul von Hintze in July 1905, confessed the following facts about the Russian naval force:

- a) We knew that personnel reforms were needed. But the war prevented us from starting them. However we did not guess that the revolutionary movement would win so much ground within a year, as was shown by the riots in the navy. Propaganda was introduced to the ranks by the reservists.
- b) The recuperation of the material losses will be the next step in personnel reforms; new orders will only be issued when they are necessary to keep the Russian dockyards busy. This will only happen to provide the workers with tasks. Ships will be ordered later, as soon as the personnel question is solved.
- c) The navy would prefer to hold off on internal orders until the experiences of the Battle of Tsushima have been processed. However, this information is not available yet, because the Japanese do not allow captured Russian officers to send messages other than about their condition.⁴⁵

For the officers of the German navy, it was obvious that Russia would not be able to pose a threat against Germany's Imperial Fleet in the near future. The naval military planners therefore could omit the Russian navy from their war plans for several years to come. However, the war would not only cause such considerations among German naval officers, as the success of Japan's soldiers also played an important role with regard to the plans for a future war in the heart of Europe,.

⁴² A. Janson, *Das Zusammenwirken von Heer und Flotte im russisch-japanischen Kriege 1904/5* (Berlin: Eisenschmidt, 1905); Hauptmann Lothes, “Befestigte Flottenstützpunkte am Beispiel der Kwantung-Halbinsel (Port Arthur 1898-1904),” *Vierteljahreshefte für Truppenführung und Heereskunde* 7 (1905), 556-577; H. Polmann, *Der Küstenkrieg und das strategische Zusammenwirken von Heer und Flotte im russisch-japanischen Kriege 1904/05* (Berlin: Mittler, 1912); E. Reventlow, *Der russisch-japanische Krieg: Armeeausgabe* (Berlin: C.A. Weller, 1906). Those who had observed the war also later published their experiences: Albert Hopman, *Das Logbuch eines deutschen Seeoffiziers* (Berlin: August Scheel, 1924).

⁴³ German Embassy in China, von Mumm, to Chancellor Count von Bülow, Peiteiho, August 20, 1905, BArch MArch, RM 5/5768.

⁴⁴ “Der Kampf um die Seeherrschaft,” Special Print from *Marine-Rundschau*, First Issue, 1906, BArch MArch, RM 5/5771, 513.

⁴⁵ Naval Attaché for the Nordic Empires, Paul von Hintze, to the State Secretary of the German Imperial Naval Office, Berlin, St. Petersburg, July 14, 1905, BArch MArch, RM 5/5769.

The chief of the German general staff, Alfred von Schlieffen (1833-1913), was well informed about the war in East Asia.⁴⁶ While Schlieffen, as well as many others like him, might have initially believed in a final Russian victory, he changed his mind about Russia's military strength as a consequence of the war and Japan's steady successes on all Manchurian battlefields.⁴⁷ When the chief of the general staff was asked for his opinion about Russia and its role in a possible war in Europe by Chancellor Bernhard von Bülow (1849-1929), Schlieffen gave an answer that highlights his conclusions being related to the experiences of the Russo-Japanese War, and therefore should be quoted at length here:

Russia will, as soon as it signs peace with Japan, withdraw its army corps and divisions from East Asia. After around six months there will probably be the same number of troops in European Russia as there were at the beginning of 1904. It will be a bit longer before weapon and munition supplies are recovered and the artillery material is renewed. After a while the old army could be externally recovered. Internally, however, there will be many differences. We have known for a long time that the Russian army has no important leaders, and it was known that the majority of officers had little worth, and that the training of the troops could only be described as insufficient. In contrast, the Russian soldier was regarded as one of the best in the world. His unasked for loyalty, his patient perseverance, his calm defiance of death were recognized as invaluable qualities. Now the faith in these qualities has been badly shaken. The loyalty was not always truly blind. Many cases have been reported in which the officers did not order, but beg, persuade, or negotiate. ... Troops rarely fought to their last [during the Manchurian campaigns]. ... Most notably, the Russian soldier is not trained. He does not know how to shoot or to maneuver in battle. ... The perfection of the armory now demands very careful training. Since the Russians did not receive it, they are no match for another army, and not useful in any attack. The East Asian war has shown that the Russian army was even worse than estimated by common sense, and the war did not improve it but made it worse. ... It is doubtful there will be an improvement, since self-awareness is lacking. The Russians do not seek the reason for their defeat in their own general incapacities, but in the superior numbers of their enemy and the inability of individual leaders. ... It will therefore just match the natural development of things when the Russian army does not get better but worse.⁴⁸

Schlieffen eventually took the lessons of the Russo-Japanese War and incorporated them into his thoughts about a German two-front war against Russia in France, which he named *Denkschrift für einen Krieg gegen Frankreich (Memorandum for a War against France*, written during the winter of 1905/06), and which was later called and is usually referred to as the Schlieffen Plan.⁴⁹ Some elements of this plan would eventually be the basis for

⁴⁶ Chief of the General Staff of the Army, Alfred von Schlieffen, to the Imperial Vice Admiral and Chief of the Admiral Staff of the Navy, Wilhelm von Büchsel, Berlin, January 28, 1904, BArch MArch, RM 5/5777.

⁴⁷ Notes of the Reporting Secretary in the Foreign Office, Count von Lichnowsky, Berlin 19 April 1904, GP No. 6031. It must be highlighted here, that French military thinkers and planners, due to the alliance with Russia, also observed the events in the Far East and had to begin to incorporate them into their strategy for a future war. For a detailed analysis of the French side: Olivier Cosson, *Préparer la Grande Guerre - L'armée française et la guerre russo-japonaise (1899-1914)* (Paris: Les Indes savantes, 2013), especially chapters 3-6.

⁴⁸ Chief of the General Staff, Alfred von Schlieffen, to Chancellor Count von Bülow, Berlin, June 10, 1905, GP, No. 6195.

⁴⁹ Alfred Graf von Schlieffen, "Denkschrift: Krieg gegen Frankreich" [Schlieffen-Plan], December 1905. Accessed January 5, 2017. http://www.1000dokumente.de/pdf/dok_0097_spl_de.pdf.

Germany's early operations in the First World War,⁵⁰ although one has to be careful not to conclude that the ideas of the plan remained fully uncontested or unchanged between 1905 and 1914.⁵¹

Due to the Russo-Japanese War, the military success of Japan, and the weak performance of the Russian officers and soldiers, Schlieffen could, as a consequence of his observations

design a much more aggressive plan, which would be directed towards France during this particular window of opportunity of Russian absence. His *Memorandum* must consequently be read as a war plan for a limited time span, when the weakness of the Czarist Empire could be used to fight a war against the isolated French enemy. The plan was based on the idea that Germany would have a free hand against the Western "arch enemy" and be victorious in a fast war of four to six weeks. After the victory on the Western front, all troops would then turn towards the East to fight against the Russian steamroller.⁵²

Regardless of its bad performance, the idea of the "Russian steamroller" was still alive and Schlieffen did not change his considerations about the task with regard to a possible two-front war. For Germany, France seemed to be the easier enemy and Russian weaknesses would just provide an easy start to the war, if these weaknesses, especially with regard to the mobilization of the Czarist Army, could be exploited to fight a fast war of annihilation against the French troops, before attacking the more dangerous enemy in the East later. It was Erich Ludendorff (1865-1937) who for a short time span considered a reversal of the Schlieffen idea, i.e. a victory against weak Russian troops in the East first before sending all forces against France, but as soon as Ludendorff was in full command and needed to find a solution to the military dilemma of the Western front, he also began to increase his focus on the war efforts against France and Britain, leaving Russia aside while profiting from the bad Russian performance and the eventual revolutions in 1917.⁵³ However, Japan's victory had changed not only the power relations in East Asia, but also the military

⁵⁰ Hans Ehlert, Michael Epkenhans, and Gerhard P. Gross, "Introduction: The Historiography of Schlieffen and the Schlieffen Plan," in *The Schlieffen Plan: International Perspectives on the German Strategy for World War I*, eds. Hans Ehlert, Michael Epkenhans, and Gerhard P. Gross (Lexington: Kentucky University Press, 2014), 1.

⁵¹ See in more detail the analysis of Annika Mombauer, "The Moltke Plan: A Modified Schlieffen Plan with Identical Aims?" in *The Schlieffen Plan: International Perspectives on the German Strategy for World War I*, ed. Hans Ehlert, Michael Epkenhans, and Gerhard P. Gross (Lexington: Kentucky University Press, 2014), 43-65.

⁵² Jacob, *Russo-Japanese War*, ch. 6. A more detailed discussion of the war plan and its relation to the Russo-Japanese War is provided in the same chapter.

⁵³ On Ludendorff's military ideas and concepts see the forthcoming chapter Frank Jacob, "General der Infanterie Erich Ludendorff," in *Des Kaisers militrische Elite*, ed. Lukas Grawe (Darmstadt: WBG, 2019).

thinking, especially with regard to the image of Russia's military might, for the years to come.

Conclusion

The Japanese attack on the Russian fleet at Port Arthur in the night of 8/9 February 1904 was probably only a real surprise for the Czar and his military advisors. What was a surprise for the whole world were Japan's uninterrupted victories on land and sea. British and American newspapers cheered about these victories, as a defeat for Russia also resembled a defeat for an autocratic regime and an imperial contestant in East Asia, especially in China. The Japanese became known as "Asia's Prussians," gallant soldiers who treated their enemies and POWs even better than the latter were usually treated by their own officers and governments.⁵⁴ Japan's soldiers – regardless of a growing fear related to the idea of a "yellow peril" – were perceived as well trained, well equipped, and extremely loyal to the Japanese Emperor and state. Without question they were sacrificing themselves when wave after wave of human bullets (*nikudan kōgeki*) surged against the fortress walls at Port Arthur, creating mountains of bodies and rivers of blood. Eventually, their behavior would lead to the military misconception that soldiers' spirit could decide their military fate, an idea that would be disproved by the actual experiences of the First World War a decade later.

In the case of Germany, the Japanese victories were considered indirect German victories, since the Japanese officer corps had been trained by Prussian soldiers during the Asian country's Westernization process. The sailors, soldiers, and officers in Japan's navy and army were in addition only considered successful due to Russian incapacities. If the Russian Army had been led by German officers, as the usual narrative highlighted, its performance might have been much better. In contrast to many other military observers, the German officers and observers were in a way determined by racist views and a non-acceptance of Japan as a real great power. While the Japanese Empire eventually proved to be an equal member of the concert of powers in East Asia, in Germany, the military weakness of Russia in the aftermath of the war was of much more interest than Japan's military strength. War planners, like Alfred von Schlieffen, had to deal with new facts and answered them by a reconfiguration of war plans for the case for a two-front war.

⁵⁴ Kita Yoshito, "Nichi-Ro Sensō to jindōshugi: Matsuyama furyo shūyōjo ni okeru Roshia shōbyōsha kyūgo no kentō" (The Russo-Japanese War and Humanitarianism: A Study of the Measures for Relief for Russian Wounded and Sick in the Matsuyama POW Camp), *Nihon Hōgaku* 80:2 (2014), 591-627; Mōri Yoshihiko, "Roshiajin horyu shashin korekushon' ni miru 'hakuai no kokoro' shozai" (The Existence of 'Philantropy' as Seen in the 'Photograph Collection of Russian POWs'), *Yūrashia Kenkyū* 49 (2013), 24-30.

All in all, the cultural arrogance of some of the observers and military personnel in Germany led to a misperception of the war. The actual strength of the Japanese was only considered possible due to Russian weakness, and this caused extreme strategic misconceptions for the future. If the interest in Japan's success had been more intense, one might have realized that a defensive position was much better for a war that was increasingly determined by modern technology than human spirit. Eventually, there was no glory in dying for a military cause, neither in the Russo-Japanese War, nor in the First World War.

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